

Lectionary Readings for 6th Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 25:19-34; Isaiah 55:10-13; Romans 8:1-11; St Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23.

Today we have the story of two brothers – twin brothers. Jacob and Esau. And what a story – worthy, I would imagine, of a storyline from East Enders, or Coronation Street.

It is a story of sibling rivalry and parental favouritism.

About the dangers of being overly ambitious

It is a story that reveals to us that God uses flawed people to progress his plans. It is a story about the mean spiritedness that is part of the human condition but it is also a story about values and about the need to hold on to good and right God given values in life.

Esau and Jacob were non identical twins born to Rebekah, Isaac's wife. They were born within seconds of each other, but Esau was the first born and as such was entitled to certain privileges.

The eldest son by virtue of his being the first born received a double portion in the division of the inheritance;

The right to lead the household and the obligation to take on certain spiritual responsibilities on behalf of the family.

This was still the time before the advent of priests and so the spiritual responsibilities that the eldest son had were that he had to do temple service, build the family's altar and officiate at its worship and sacrifice.

The eldest son also had to transmit God's word and his promises to the family.

So it was that the firstborn's inheritance had a strong spiritual component to it.

Esau was a hunter while Jacob was a farmer. One day Esau suddenly appeared from one of his hunting excursions, hungry, and asked Jacob for some of the red lentil stew that Jacob was cooking up.

Jacob, ever the opportunist and uncooperative younger brother, played hard to get and demanded that Esau sell him his birth right first before he would hand over any of the delicious stew.

Esau makes a rash judgement and utters those outrageous words: "What good is the birth right to me?" With that he hands over his inheritance as first born to his younger twin brother, all for a bowl of lentil stew!!

I wonder whether we have ever given up something that was rightfully ours?

Esau's decision to give up his birth right was made doubly more heart wrenching because he gave up something so very valuable, for a miserable bowl of stew.

He ripped **himself** off and he would live to regret it all the days of his life. And he seemed to do so without an ounce of remorse.

The bible tells us that 'he ate and drank and then got up and left'. The passage concludes with the terse statement of judgement that "Esau despised his birth right".

And so the text focuses our attention on the unworthiness of what Esau has done and we are free to conclude that Esau was a short sighted man who had no insight into what he was giving away.

That Esau had flawed judgment in that he gives away something so valuable in exchange for so little.

That Esau did not understand the spiritual value of his birth right and could not see beyond his physical needs and thus he bartered away his holy and precious privileges.

Clearly he had no respect for his inheritance. He had done nothing to earn it and consequently did not appreciate it. Here was a man who dashed through the needs of the moment and rejected the future for the present.

Sometimes we too, need to be reminded of what is really important in life lest like Esau we sell our souls for a figurative bowl of soup.

In Hebrews 9:15 we read: "For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance"

Like Esau, we, who are followers of Christ, are heirs to a spiritual inheritance that we have not earned. It has been given to us by grace and it is precious and it has eternal value.

And yet how easily we take for granted the faith we share through Christ and which is the basis of our relationship with God.

How easily we take for granted our Christian tradition within the community of Christ's Church.

How easily we take for granted the word of God which has been given to us through the Scriptures.

These three: **Faith, the Church and the Scriptures** are an inheritance that will ensure our spiritual wellbeing. Yet we so easily take it all for granted, or fail to value it or we exchange it for a life style that is not nearly as worthy.

It is good to remind ourselves that some of our most precious inheritances have come to us by grace and yet from time to time we exchange them for a bowl of lentils.

What is your bowl of lentils today? Each of us knows what our bowl of lentils is. It is anything that each day comes ahead of seeking God's will and walking with Him. Our behaviour reveals our values.

What have you exchanged in your lives for something far less worthy? *Take a few moments to reflect on that question.*

In South Africa you can find something called fool's gold. It is traces of gold coloured material in rocks and stones that lie near the surface. Fool's Gold has been used to re-cover iron, gold, copper, cobalt and nickel and used to make inexpensive jewellery. It can be confused with the real thing for a short time but very soon it becomes apparent that it is not real gold and is worthless. Our human nature makes us susceptible to fool's gold. We are not always able to discern what is truly valuable and so all too often we exchange our souls for something paltry as Esau did.

Yet we must learn to choose well. We must learn to recognise when to sacrifice, wait, endure, overcome, so that we might keep the better, more worthy prize. No matter how temporarily enjoyable and satisfying a choice may seem at any given moment, we must learn to measure all our choices up against the eternal rewards God's birth right promises to us.

So it is good from time to time to take stock of our lives, to review where we are spending our time, our money and our resources and to ask the Holy Spirit to guide us and enlighten us and to protect us from making rash and ill thought out choices which offer a quick fix to our problems and yet will cause us to despise the spiritual inheritance we receive.

This is a spiritual inheritance we receive through faith in Jesus Christ; through journeying in his Church and through living our lives in accordance with the Word of God. Amen.